

Briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, Moscow, January 12, 2023

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian's working visit to
the Russian Federation

On January 17, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will hold talks with his Iranian colleague, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, who will be on a working visit to Moscow.

The ministers plan to continue an exchange of views on a number of urgent international and regional issues of mutual interest, including the situation around the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on the Iranian nuclear programme, bilateral interaction at international platforms, including the UN and the SCO, developments in Syria, Afghanistan, and the South Caucasus, as well as on Caspian Sea issues.

The ministers plan to discuss the bilateral agenda, primarily the trade and economic component in the context of implementing key joint projects in energy, transport and other areas, in particular, relative to the transition to the final stage of talks on signing a full-fledged agreement on a free trade area between the EAEU and Iran.

Sergey Lavrov's news conference to review foreign policy activity in
2022

At 11:00 am Moscow time (approximately) on January 18, the Foreign Ministry Press Centre will host the traditional annual news conference by Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov. During the news conference, which will be held in person, Mr Lavrov will review foreign policy in 2022.

We are inviting Russian and foreign journalists to attend the news conference. They can also watch it online on the Foreign Ministry

website, and on our social media pages. It will be translated into a number of foreign languages.

Representatives of domestic and foreign media can take an active part in the news conference. Accreditation is open from today through 12:00 noon on January 16.

This announcement is published on the Foreign Ministry website and its social media accounts.

Sergey Lavrov to attend a joint meeting of the collegiums of the Russian and Belarusian foreign ministries

On January 19, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will visit Minsk to attend a joint meeting of the collegiums of the Russian and Belarusian foreign ministries. He will also meet with President of the Republic of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko and hold talks with Foreign Minister of Belarus Sergey Aleinik.

Collegium meetings between the Russian and Belarusian foreign ministries have been held annually since 2000 and are an effective mechanism for aligning the two countries' efforts in the international arena. During the upcoming meeting, the parties will consider the implementation of the Programme of Coordinated Foreign Policy Actions of States Parties to the Treaty Establishing the Union State for 2022-2023. They will focus on matters concerning the two countries' cooperation on foreign policy planning, coordination of steps with regard to the EU, NATO and the Council of Europe, coordinated work in the OSCE, interaction on multilateral arms control platforms and countering the West's efforts to politicise international economic and human rights organisations.

The joint collegium meeting will be timed to coincide with a significant date in the common history of Russia and Belarus, the 210th anniversary of the victory in the Patriotic War of 1812 (January 6, 1813, Gregorian calendar) and upcoming professional days: Diplomatic Worker's Days in Belarus (January 22) and Russia (February 10).

Following the meeting, the parties plan to sign the Resolution of the collegium meeting, the Plan of inter-MFA consultations for 2023 and the intergovernmental Memorandum of Understanding on ensuring biological safety.

Ukraine crisis update

On January 1, Ukraine celebrated, at the state level, the birth anniversary of the “Hitlerite agent Bandera” – this is exactly how this Ukrainian nationalist, responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of Ukrainians, Russians, Poles and Jews, was referred to in archival documents declassified by the CIA three years ago.

Torchlight processions were held in his honour in Kiev and a number of other Ukrainian cities – I would say, this good old tradition (I mean bad, of course), which should have been left in the past, is now being carefully reincarnated by the Vladimir Zelensky regime. The Verkhovna Rada posted a laudatory statement on its social media pages that the Ukrainian authorities actually quickly removed after a request from the Polish Prime Minister. Western Ukraine is almost ready to canonise that accomplice in Nazi crimes. I know this sounds strange, but it’s a fact. A Christmas nativity scene with a figurine of him was installed in the Lvov Region on the Holy Nativity day, a feast celebrated by Christians, in particular Orthodox Christians. Does the phrase “nativity scene” mean something different in the Lvov Region these days? This is difficult to understand, considering the processes that are ongoing, including with regard to religious freedoms (more on this later).

The Zelensky regime has gone so far in its neo-Nazi frenzy as to take the liberty of questioning the Nuremberg Trials verdicts. In December 2022, the Supreme Court of Ukraine upheld the non-recognition of the infamous SS Galicia division symbols as Nazi symbols. What does SS stand for then? What does this acronym mean? Is it a new acronym or someone’s initials? Maybe the Bankova Street politicians can tell us what SS means as they see it?

The United States and its NATO allies hypocritically turn a blind eye to the cultivation of neo-Nazism in Ukraine, considering the revival of Bandera's ideas as a part of the anti-Russia struggle. It's not like they disagree, but they support this to back Ukraine politically. They cultivate and encourage this and make every effort to ensure that this specific ideology becomes dominant throughout Ukraine.

The Kiev authorities intend to pursue a plan "to overcome the consequences of Russification" and "to wage a campaign to rename hundreds of streets bearing Pushkin's name." When choosing between Stepan Bandera and Alexander Pushkin, Pushkin is not their first choice. This is obvious. After all, who is this Alexander Pushkin compared to Stepan Bandera? This is what Ukraine's Minister of Culture Alexander Tkachenko said. A bill to this effect has already been submitted to the Verkhovna Rada. It would be interesting to see if they also get their hands on Nikolay Gogol or leave him alone in his current status. I think his time will come, and pretty soon. They have already gone to great lengths to scoff at his creative legacy, his life path. They have called him so many names, and treated his writing in so many unthinkable ways. I think that at a certain point, considering the power of Gogol's prose and his attitude towards Russia and the Russian culture, we will soon see the same effort to delete Nikolay Gogol from the history of Ukraine and its people, take down wall carvings depicting him, and scrape street signs bearing his name. Just wait and see. What is happening now with Alexander Pushkin in Ukraine is part of the policy to revise and falsify history and combat our shared past. This is more than our shared past, it is historical facts.

Monuments to prominent Russian and Soviet figures are being demolished and desecrated across Ukraine, with the demolition of Alexander Matrosov's monument in his hometown of Dnepropetrovsk as the latest example. They rename streets and social institutions in honour of Nazi criminals. In 2022, Vinnitsa renamed Leo Tolstoy Street to Stepan Bandera Street. I have a question for Vladimir Zelensky: Has Leo Tolstoy become such a big nuisance for you? Without him, the sun shines brighter over Ukraine, doesn't it? In Ternopol, they renamed Alexander Pushkin

Street in honour of the “defenders of Ukraine.” Could it be that they do not have any new streets or do not build anything new? There is nothing new in perpetuating the names they want to be remembered, so instead of building, they rename the existing infrastructure. Is this so? Judging by the facts and sticking with this metaphor, what we see resembles Ukraine’s transformation into a global Stepan Bandera Impasse.

Flagrant human rights violations continue in Ukraine with all its disregard for the feelings of millions of believers. We have already noted that the Kiev regime decided to root out the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC). It uses criminal methods, including raids, to transfer its sacred sites to the schismatics from the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, artificially created in 2018. UOC priests receive threats of physical reprisal. Just an hour ago I received information, and I know that it has yet to be verified, saying that churches and places of worship refusing to conform to the will of the schismatic Orthodox Church of Ukraine and carrying on with their canonical service within the Ukrainian Orthodox Church are now facing arson attacks.

The authorities decided to deliberately spoil the glorious feast of Christmas by staging an overt provocation aimed at removing the canonical church from the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra. For the first time ever, representatives of the schismatic Orthodox Church of Ukraine performed the Christmas service in the main place of worship of the monastery – the Assumption Cathedral. This was a planned political step – the Charter of the Holy Dormition of the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine was legally registered on December 1, 2022. This act legalised the beginning of attempts by schismatics to lay their hands on the Lavra. All this is being done with prompting from the regime. This is not a question of internal confrontation whereby some believers adhere to canonic services whereas others have different views. It is politically orchestrated, but not by Ukrainian citizens. All this is presented to them as an already adopted and endorsed decision. Washington is playing first fiddle in these efforts. But the Ukrainian authorities did not stop at that. It became known on Christmas Eve that Vladimir Zelensky

issued an executive order suspending the citizenship of 13 metropolitans and archbishops of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. In religious, philosophical and historical literature this was known as “anti-religious outrage,” and this is what it is.

We are convinced that despite these heinous and terrible crimes, the Kiev authorities will not succeed in ruining the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church with which the overwhelming majority of the country’s Orthodox believers associate themselves.

When asked why we, as authorities, representatives of foreign government structures are expressing our opinions on religious life, I will say that this is a universally accepted norm – to defend freedoms, including religious freedoms of people who are being forced to change. They are “refashed” and forced to give up on their native tongue and believe in a different history. Now, on top of all that, their traditional canonical religion is being replaced with some imposture that has nothing to do with actual history. We are seeing how the Western political regimes, that pretend to be civilised, are starting to shout on various strange occasions, protecting sects and extremist organisations that pose as religious without representing any traditional religion. We act strictly in line with international law. We observe everything we have signed. The overwhelming majority of OSCE countries and UN members have also assumed these commitments and have reaffirmed them more than once. We are not doing anything that is not written in international law in this case.

The Kiev regime continues shelling Russian territory. It is striking at residential neighbourhoods, at hospitals and schools, thereby multiplying the number of war crimes. On January 3, the Armed Forces of Ukraine (VSU) attacked a hospital in the city of Tokmak in Zaporozhye Region with a HIMARS multiple rocket launcher. The blast wave knocked out windows in a pediatrics building and a maternity home where people, including children were staying.

We call on the relevant international organisations, including the World Health Organisation and the International Committee of the

Red Cross, to provide a principled assessment of the Kiev regime, the actions of which continue to pose threats to civilians.

The Kiev regime and its Western curators' cynical reaction to Russia's proposal to introduce a ceasefire during Orthodox Christmas clearly shows their desire to continue the war until the last Ukrainian. Vladimir Zelensky outright told Ukrainian forces not to stop shooting and called Russia's purely humanitarian gesture "a hypocritical cover to build up troops in order to continue the hostilities with renewed vigour." The West didn't want a ceasefire, either. President of the European Council Charles Michel called Russia's announcement of a unilateral ceasefire "false and hypocritical." Apparently, Brussels even forgot its own history in its efforts to rewrite global history. As a reminder, Belgium was part of Christmas ceasefires in 1914 during the First World War.

The Ukraine conflict has become a goldmine for the US military-industrial complex. Using the Ukrainian people as cannon fodder (maybe that's why they banned Leo Tolstoy), the US elite, regardless of party affiliation, regularly serve the interests of their own industrialists who profit from military exports to Ukraine and other countries. In response to corresponding requests from Kiev, the Capitol approved, in late December, an additional almost \$45 billion in allocations to Ukraine during this financial year. A new package of military equipment for Kiev, valued at \$2.85 billion, was announced on January 6.

Despite this, the Kiev authorities believe that their Western allies are not doing enough to help Ukraine. There's nothing unusual about this. It's a conspiracy designed to profit from blood money. This was stated by Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmitry Kuleba who stubbornly pushed to have his German counterpart Annalena Baerbock, who visited Kiev and Kharkov on January 9, provide guarantees that Berlin would supply Leopard tanks to Ukraine. In an interview with Newsweek on January 7, Ukraine's Ambassador to the UK Vadim Pristayko urged the NATO countries to overcome their prejudices (What an optimist! He believes that prejudices still exist.) ...and "to not miss this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity" to provide the large quantities of weapons that Kiev needs "in order to

defeat their sworn enemy.” I have a question for all those who turn away and pretend not to see or hear what is happening, express pacifism and lack of involvement in the situation and failure to take a position: Do you know how to read? Can you read these very phrases? The Ambassador of Ukraine to the United Kingdom urged the West to cast aside its prejudices and “to not miss this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to defeat the sworn enemy.” What else do you need to understand about what is going on and what has been going on, if the enemy, as they say, is a “sworn enemy?”

It is well known that the goal of the West in Ukraine is to inflict maximum damage on Russia, which has been doctrinally declared the main adversary of the United States, at any cost. The US-made and other Western weapons in Ukraine, as well as the foreign military personnel servicing them, are legitimate targets for strikes by the Russian Armed Forces. If the West pretends it is unaware of this, that’s their problem. We have made that clear many times.

We have taken note of the ongoing bellicose statements by Ukrainian officials. Secretary of the National Security Council of Ukraine Alexey Danilov recently issued an open threat to organise acts of sabotage in Russia. Do not be confused: doing things like that in another country is not an act of sabotage, but a terrorist attack. So, next time say exactly what you mean. You are a regime that professes the logic of terrorism; no need to hide behind the word sabotage. It’s a whole different story. Open a dictionary to find out where the word “sabotage” comes from. I won’t tell you, although I’ve said it many times. Your underlings engage in terrorist activities, something we have also discussed. Don’t be shy. We should call things for what they are. You are good at euphemisms. So, go ahead and rename the acts of sabotage perpetrated by the Kiev regime as acts of terrorism, which is what they are based on your actions in recent years.

Advisor to President Zelensky Mikhail Podolyak and head of the Ukrainian Defence Ministry’s Main Intelligence Directorate, Kirill Budanov, continue to daydream about Russian Crimea (I’m tempted to call this a circus, but I don’t want to offend the Zapashny brothers), and to put forward ideas that are far beyond reality and

common sense, and mental health, too. At the same time, Kiev does not hesitate to acknowledge the fact that ordinary Ukrainians are expendable material for them in their war against Russia. The other day, Ukrainian Defence Minister Alexey Reznikov stated directly that by participating in the conflict with Russia the Armed Forces of Ukraine are fulfilling a NATO mission in which the alliance is not shedding its own blood, but the blood of Ukrainians. This is above and beyond morality. You talk like that about the people who elected you and brought you to power, the people to whom you promised the moon. I'm talking to Bankova Street now. What are you doing? You are saying that you are serving NATO by killing your own citizens. You are not doing this in the interests of Ukraine, but in order to "fulfill this NATO mission." So, the image that many female citizens of Ukraine created in Europe and beyond can now be safely extrapolated to all of the Kiev regime led by Zelensky ("service personnel.")

No matter how hard the collective West tries to arm Ukrainian forces and orient the Ukrainian authorities towards continuing its confrontation with Russia, servicing the interests of the West and carrying out NATO missions, these attempts are doomed. All the goals of the special military operation that the Russian leadership has expressed will be fulfilled.

Certain facts indicating the misuse of Western weapons supplied to Ukraine

We have repeatedly spoken, in Foreign Ministry briefings and other statements, about the evidence of numerous instances of the misuse of the weapons supplied by NATO countries to Ukraine. Since the first weeks, we have warned that these weapons would spread across the European continent, and no one would ever be safe there from being attacked with one of these weapons sold on the black market. This is already an industry. It has gone beyond isolated facts or cases; it is a global reality.

On June 1, 2022, Interpol Secretary-General Jürgen Stock warned that after the end of the conflict in Ukraine, there is a high probability that illegal trade in weapons originally intended for Kiev would intensify.

On July 1, 2022, an investigation conducted by the RT channel revealed black markets that operate via the “darknet” and are an important element in brokering illegal transactions. Missiles for the Javelin anti-tank system are offered at \$30,000 (when they cost US taxpayers \$178,000); missiles for the NLAW anti-tank systems are offered at \$15,000, Switchblade 600 kamikaze drones at \$7,000, small arms, grenades and body armor, at \$1,100 - \$3,600 (including delivery within Ukraine). The seller and the buyer do not even have to meet in person: after the buyer transfers the money, they receive the coordinates that mark the location of the purchased weapons. Everything the darknet markets are known for with respect to illegal goods, now includes the weapons the West is sending to Ukraine.

On July 21, 2022, the Office of the Ukrainian National Security and Defence Council and the country’s Ministry of Defence announced the launch of the SOTA information and analytical system for monitoring arms supplies to Ukraine from partner countries to ensure transparency. That is, six months ago, the Kiev regime itself actually tried to gain control of the “circulation” of weapons that are supplied by the West. However, since the activation of the system, there has been no report on the results of its work. Because it’s useless.

On July 22, 2022, Europol spokesman Jan Op Gen Oorth, in an interview with the German news agency DPA, mentioned the alarmingly high risk that weapons sent to Ukraine would end up in the hands of organised crime or terrorists. He said there were known cases where people have left Ukraine with weapons. According to Europol, criminal networks in the region plan to smuggle large quantities of arms and ammunition, including heavy weapons, using existing supply routes and online platforms. Can you imagine this? Not swords and knives, but heavy weapons. Not something criminals have managed to hide from the police in the

past. Heavy weapons are now leaving the territory of Ukraine in unknown directions to surface elsewhere later. This is Interpol data.

On August 4, 2022 the American CBS released a documentary "Arming Ukraine." It was about arms smuggling and the greater frequency of such incidents in Ukraine. Volunteers and military experts appearing in the film maintained that from 60 to 70 percent of Western aid did not reach the Armed Forces of Ukraine at all (these were not arms that went to the Armed Forces of Ukraine and disappeared later). If we proceed from these figures, the 30-40 percent that reach them are also subject to the same trends. Can you imagine the arms shipments and numbers of weapons spreading uncontrollably? However, several days later the documentary was removed from the CBS website without any warning. The company explained that the information on this subject needed to be updated. Expert quotes criticising the Ukrainian military also disappeared from previews of the documentary on social media. And these were quotes from experts. Everything was cleaned up, including on social media.

In an interview with the Finnish news agency Yle, Detective Superintendent of Finland's Central Criminal Police, Christer Ahlgren, said that weapons initially sent to Ukraine, including assault rifles, pistols, grenades and combat drones, were discovered in a number of European countries. We understand well the situation because we repeatedly went through customs while boarding flights. There are announcements and warnings that it is forbidden to bring cold weapons, pistols, grenades, etc. Yes, such things happen. People try to take some of them onboard. But what about combat drones? This cannot happen due to neglect or accident. It is impossible to carry a combat drone in a suitcase either by plane, train or ship. There must be a completely different chain for the delivery and supply of these drones to the "non-destination" countries. At any rate, this was the case before. Now I wouldn't be surprised at anything. In Ahlgren's words, Finnish criminal groups are "very interested" in acquiring modern military systems, ammunition and weapons. He said Ukrainian weapons

have already turned up in the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden. All three states abstained from any comments.

On November 1, 2022, quoting anonymous sources in the US Department of State, The Washington Post noted that a mere 10 percent out of 22,000 units of arms requiring special control, were subjected to inspection.

On November 17, 2022, US Congress announced the start of auditing for all supplies and financial packages for Ukraine. Marjorie Taylor Greene, a Republican in the House of Representatives and one of the authors of this initiative, explained that the American people deserve to know how their hard-earned tax dollars are spent when they are sent to a foreign state that is not a NATO member. I would say that this is no longer even a question of money. It is something quite different. Americans and other taxpayers and all people in the world deserve to know where NATO weapons are spreading and in what amounts.

S p e a k i n g a t t h e 1 6 t h
Summit of Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) on November 30, 2022, President of Nigeria Muhammadu Buhari noted that the authorities of the republic had already discovered weapons intended for Ukraine in the hands of extremists. This is Chad – no common border with Ukraine. Meanwhile, these weapons were meant for Ukraine.

On December 15, 2022, a grenade launcher exploded in the office of Jaroslaw Szymczyk, Commander-in-Chief of the Police in Poland. According to the Zet radio station, the weapons were brought to Warsaw from Kiev by a special train without border controls. What is going on here?

On December 16, 2022, Prime Minister of the UK Rishi Sunak decided to audit the aid granted to Ukraine. He said London wants to know what it has invested and what it has gained from it. I could advise him to look at our briefings and skip the audit. We will tell the Brits what they have invested and what they have gained.

NATO Secretary General Yens Stoltenberg receives award of Gunnar Sonsteby, hero of Norway's resistance

We noted that on January 9 of this year, NATO Secretary General Yens Stoltenberg received an award named for Gunnar Sonsteby, an outstanding hero of Norway's Resistance Movement during World War II. This award is annually given by the eponymous fund for "the defence of democratic values." The fund mentioned the services of the new winner – his efforts to maintain unity in NATO in difficult times, advancing Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO and assistance to Ukraine.

We consider it absurd and sacrilegious to give an award honouring Sonsteby, who took part in the joint struggle of Soviet and Norwegian people against Nazism, to a figure that has done nothing to serve democracy or promote peace and security in Europe, especially since NATO, under its Norwegian head, is supporting the Nazi-glorifying Kiev regime and pumping it full of weapons.

Let me remind everyone that what the collective West, primarily NATO, is supporting is the SS Galicia division, swastikas, Bandera, heroes of collaborationism and torch marches. How can prizes in honour of anti-Nazis be given to the people who support Nazism today? It is unacceptable. But unfortunately, that is what's happening.

Act of terror in Kabul

We strongly condemn the act of terror that took place on January 11 of this year in the direct proximity of the Foreign Ministry of Afghanistan in Kabul, for which ISIS claimed responsibility. According to preliminary estimates, over 40 people, including

Afghan diplomats, were killed and wounded. Information on the victims continues to come in. We would like to convey our condolences to the families and friends of the dead and wish a speedy recovery to the wounded.

This tragic event is just the latest in a series of attacks on Russian and Pakistani diplomatic missions in Kabul and a Kabul hotel with Chinese guests.

We hope the Afghan government will conduct a thorough investigation of the terror attack and bring the guilty to justice. We urge the Afghan authorities to act with urgency to eradicate the terrorist threat in the country. We note the importance of coordinating regional and international efforts in countering this evil.

The Armenia-Azerbaijan settlement

We have received a number of partly overlapping questions from news agencies such as TASS, Anadolu, Vestnik Kavkaza, the Verelk information and analytical centre, The Moscow Post, and the NEWS.ru website, concerning Moscow's relations with Baku and Yerevan and various aspects of Armenian-Azerbaijani normalisation. Most of the questions, in one way or another, follow up on the events that took place during a January 10 news conferences by Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan and President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev.

Without a doubt, we are concerned about the negative trends in relations between Baku and Yerevan that have surfaced in recent weeks, the ratcheting up of harsh rhetoric and the exchange of accusations followed by mounting tensions in the region. We call on the Azerbaijani and Armenian sides to demonstrate goodwill and jointly look for compromise solutions. We will help as best we can.

The other day, we commented on contradictory remarks by the Armenian leader concerning the drafting of a peace treaty with Baku. To reiterate, unfortunately, the Armenian side missed a good opportunity to hold another round of negotiations with the Azerbaijanis on December 23, 2022 in Moscow and use it to

discuss important issues such as the Lachin Corridor situation. Regardless, our proposal remains on the table and we are ready to provide a platform for talks between the foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan.

During a question session with journalists, Nikol Pashinyan made many other notable statements, in particular with regard to the CSTO, which the Kremlin has already commented on.

Clearly, Armenia continues to act in line with its armed forces' priorities and based on ongoing developments. As a reminder, last year, too, the Armenian Defence Ministry failed to provide military contingents to participate in the joint CSTO exercises in Kazakhstan.

This creates certain difficulties for the allies, forcing them to redraw plans that have already been agreed upon by the military agencies. As we understand it, this work is underway as part of the CSTO. We believe that the best solutions will ultimately be identified and the training of CSTO peacekeepers will effectively take place this year in order to coordinate their actions and to improve their combat skills.

With regard to the Lachin Corridor, we continue to work towards its complete unblocking in accordance with the Statement of the leaders of Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia dated November 9, 2020. Consistent steps to de-escalate the situation are being taken by the Russian Interior Ministry, the Russian Defence Ministry and the command of the Russian peacekeeping contingent. We must identify a solution that all parties will find acceptable. Humanitarian convoys are using the corridor now. To reiterate, we consider unwarranted public attacks or provocations against our peacekeepers who are acting as guarantors of peace in that region. Actions of that kind can severely damage the process of Armenian-Azerbaijani normalisation.

With regard to the draft UN Security Council press statement which focused on the Lachin Corridor, detailed clarifications were provided by the Russian Permanent Mission in New York. It was emphasised

that despite our constructive approach, the French authors of the document ignored the overwhelming majority of Russian proposals. Our Western colleagues failed to muster the courage to even state the facts in the text and, in particular, to mention the statements of the leaders of Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia, which underlie Armenian-Azerbaijani normalisation. In any case, we are committed to doing substantive work to resolve the situation with the Lachin Corridor rather than engage in acts of populism.

With regard to delimiting the Armenian-Azerbaijani border, we consistently support the activities of the dedicated bilateral commission. We are willing to assist in its work in every way, including by providing cartographic materials. Progress on this track will make it possible to effectively resolve disputes on the ground. The corresponding Trilateral Working Group co-chaired by the deputy prime ministers of Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia is dealing with unblocking transport links in the region. Major preparatory work has been done with its supervision. Additional joint efforts are required to put it into practice.

Separately, I would like to comment on the questions about our relations with Armenia and answer them. The Russian and Armenian peoples are bound by strong bonds of friendship that are deeply rooted in history. We are committed to continue to strengthen in every possible way bilateral relations and interaction within common integration associations like the CSTO, the EAEU, and the CIS.

Against this background, statements coming from Yerevan to the effect that “Russia’s presence poses a threat to Armenia’s security” are absurd. For decades now, our military and border guards have been making a major contribution to ensuring Armenia’s security and guarding its borders. This is objective reality that can’t be denied. Moreover, earlier, Armenian leadership publicly stated that Russia’s military presence is consistent with the national interests of the republic. Reckless politicians who encourage showing the door to our service people clearly do not understand the consequences of this step.

To reiterate, we put together the questions and have given fairly detailed answers to them. If you have more questions on this matter, please keep in mind that we have already commented on many of them.

Sweden refuses again to cooperate on the investigation of the situation around the Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines

It amazed us that the Swedish authorities have refused to give a substantive reply to another request by the Prosecutor-General's Office of the Russian Federation about legal assistance in the criminal case relating to the damage done to the Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2 pipelines in September 2022.

I mentioned the Russian Prosecutor General's Office. I am pleased to congratulate our colleagues on their professional holiday, which we are marking today.

Official Stockholm has explained this by claiming that granting our request would have posed a threat to their country's security. It is amazing. Do you, our colleagues in Stockholm, regard the explosions on the gas pipelines as a threat to Sweden? If you do, we would like to conduct an investigation based on international law, which would identify who in reality is posing a threat to Sweden and [other] Baltic Sea countries and do it in such a way as to preclude incidents like this from taking place in the future. We regard ourselves as a party which has suffered considerable losses. It is not even about losses. But what has been done to the infrastructure that took the parties to the project, including Russia, many years to build amounts to immense damage. We have the right to receive relevant information and ask questions and you must answer them.

Incidentally, in 2020, the Swedish authorities resorted to the same fantastically vague arguments to explain why they had refused Russia legal assistance in investigating the incident with Alexey Navalny.

At the same time Russia was informed that the Swedish prosecutor's office was not interested in taking action on the Russian initiative to set up a joint investigation team to look into the ruptures of the pipelines. How does Sweden explain its lack of interest in conducting a normal and comprehensive investigation jointly with Russia as a country that has suffered losses? Nor did Russia receive a reply – in violation of the international diplomatic etiquette – to the message that Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin sent to the Swedish head of government three months ago where he points to the need to conduct a comprehensive and transparent investigation of the incident in question with the participation of representatives of the Russian authorities and Gazprom officials.

This begs the question, why then is Sweden being so obstinate, as well as the governments of other neighbouring countries, which are involved in the investigation of these acts of sabotage? All details must be clarified. Why do they not allow us to join in the investigation? Are they hiding something? No one has any doubt today that the pipelines were damaged through an act of sabotage or a terrorist act – these details are to be clarified as, clearly, it was not an accident. What “threats to national security” is Stockholm talking about? What's at issue is the threat that Russian experts might draw inconvenient conclusions during an unbiased investigation and, at last, alert the public to the unseemly truth about the perpetrators of these acts of sabotage or terrorist acts? Who is behind them? Who masterminded and carried them out? The suppression of the facts is irrefutable evidence that the Swedish authorities are clearly hiding something.

Possible presence of foreign military in the Malvinas (Falklands)

In January of 2023, it will be 190 years since the start of the colonisation of the Malvinas/Falklands by the United Kingdom (1833). This laid the foundation for a long-term dispute between

Argentina and Britain on the sovereignty of the archipelago, which led to a bloody armed confrontation in the 20th century.

The UN has been reviewing this issue for several decades now. Its Special Committee on Decolonisation (S24) is working on it among others. As a result, the UN General Assembly and other international forums have adopted numerous resolutions urging Argentina and Great Britain to resume talks with a view to drafting a final solution on the sovereignty of the islands, and to abstain from unilateral actions that can affect the situation in the South Atlantic.

At the same time, Great Britain has not shown any interest in settling this dispute. Moreover, it is taking steps to aggravate the situation in the South Atlantic. Thus, at the end of last year, London and Pristina (don't be surprised, I am referring to Kosovo) agreed to hold joint training exercises of the British military and representatives of the Kosovo Security Forces on the territory of the Malvinas. I understand this sounds apocalyptic but it's a fact.

In this context, we noted a statement by the most representative regional association – the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC). In this statement, all 33 Latin American and Caribbean states, with an aggregate population of over 600 million people, denounced this provocation by Great Britain.

We are in solidarity with this assessment by CELAC. We see in Britain's reluctance to hear the voice of Latin America its disdainful attitude towards the resolutions of this multilateral organisation. I realize that people who are not deeply involved with Balkan issues, or Malvinas issues, may think that they misheard something. What does the Kosovo military have to do with the Argentina-UK issue? But this is a fact. Today's reality is that the Anglo-Saxon world has stopped being coy about anything. They are going ahead with the implementation of their goals and don't even feel the need to hide anything. Britain is cynically misusing the Kosovo military to promote its own agenda in a region where it is not even represented. Meanwhile, all disputes must be resolved in line with international law. The mechanisms exist for this purpose.

Thus, by planning to use the Kosovo military in its operations in the Malvinas, Britain is helping enhance the combat readiness of the Kosovo Security Forces. In this way, it is acting as a leading supporter of their transformation into full-fledged armed forces in violation of the relevant resolution of the UN Security Council. This goal is worse than it seems at first glance. Britain is not only pursuing its own interests in Latin America but it is also training the Kosovo Security Forces to allow them to gain the needed experience. This is a terrible story. I think this is the perfect example of the entire Anglo-Saxon philosophy.

We would like to emphasise again that the Russian position of principle on the Malvinas/Falklands remains the same. We advocate the need for the early resumption of direct talks between Argentina and Great Britain with a view to reaching a peaceful and final settlement of the dispute on the sovereignty of the islands in line with UN resolutions.

We consider it necessary to abstain from steps that may complicate the beginning of these talks. We believe that the militarisation of the South Atlantic is unacceptable and that the sides should strictly abide by their international commitments.

Russia-Brazil cooperation

On January 1, 2023, Brasilia hosted the inauguration ceremony for President of Brazil Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, who won the October 2022 election.

The enduring friendship and mutual respect between Russia and Brazil have formed a strong bond between them. In 2023, we will mark the 195th anniversary of diplomatic relations between our countries. Sustained and effective efforts to expand bilateral cooperation fully meet the interests of our countries.

It is with a sense of satisfaction that we note proactive contacts between Russia and Brazil at the highest level. On December 20, 2022, President Vladimir Putin had a telephone conversation with Luiz Inacio Lula, during which both sides expressed confidence that

the Russian-Brazilian strategic partnership will continue to develop successfully in all areas.

On December 31, 2022, President of Brazil Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva had a meeting with Speaker of the Federation Council of Russia's Federal Assembly Valentina Matviyenko, who headed the Russian delegation at the inauguration ceremony of the newly elected Brazilian leadership.

The Russia-Brazil High-Level Cooperation Commission plays an important role in promoting practical cooperation between the two countries. It is co-chaired by Prime Minister of the Russian Federation and Vice President of the Federative Republic of Brazil.

The two countries maintain a proactive dialogue at the level of their foreign ministries and have a Plan of Consultations between the foreign ministries of Russia and Brazil for 2022-2025.

Our countries have a shared commitment to building a more just, democratic, multipolar world order based on the principle of sovereign equality of states, taking into consideration each other's interests, mutually respectful dialogue, and respect for international norms, primarily the UN Charter.

We work closely together on ensuring global food and energy security, promoting sustainable development, fighting climate change, and addressing other urgent issues.

Russia and Brazil have been constructive in their cooperation within various multilateral frameworks, including BRICS, the Group of Twenty, as well as the United Nations and its Security Council, where Brazil currently holds a non-permanent seat.

Brazil is Russia's biggest trade partner in Latin America. Russia supplies the Brazilian agricultural industry with eco-friendly mineral fertiliser, while sourcing various agricultural products from this South American nation. We also share bilateral ties in high-technology sectors: pharmaceuticals, energy, including nuclear power, and space exploration. Overall, our two economies have

achieved a high level of complementarity and have considerable potential. But there is definitely room for further expanding our ties. In this context, it would be apt to quote Pele, the football legend who recently passed away, who said that “Russia will become the world football champion when Brazil becomes a world champion in hockey.”

We are promoting cultural and humanitarian cooperation. A unique and important joint culture and arts project, the Bolshoi Theatre School has been working since 2000 in Joinville, state of Santa Catarina. It has an important social mission and enrolls many children from low-income families. The Russia-Brazil intercultural bilingual school opened in Rio de Janeiro in 2022.

Educational exchanges have a special role in bilateral relations. Every year, the Government offers state scholarships to Brazilian youth for studying at Russian universities – they received 47 scholarships for the 2022-2023 academic year. Overall, over 400 Brazilian students study in Russia.

We hope to be able to make substantial progress in strengthening the relations of a strategic partnership between Russia and Brazil in all their aspects under Luiz Inacio Lula’s administration.

Jehovah’s Witnesses activities restricted in Norway

On December 22, 2022, the Norwegian authorities revoked the registration of the Jehovah’s Witnesses as a religious community, citing systematic violations of law and the unwillingness of the organisation’s leaders to abandon their illegal practices.

At the same time the loss of registration does not mean that the organisation’s activities are banned in Norway – it is rather about restrictions on the organisation’s authority and privileges, as well as the Norwegian authorities’ readiness to respond strongly to any failure to comply with national law.

Interestingly, this principled stand does not prevent Oslo from criticising our country for taking measures against Jehovah's Witnesses if they fail to comply with Russian law and take part in anti-Russia demarches at international forums to protest acts of oppression of similar pseudo-religious organisations allegedly taking place in our country. How is it to be handled? Why is it like this? It is about the same organisation, and Russia and Norway lodge similar complaints against it while the political response is completely different. When the same things occur in Russia, the West, including Norway, say we have no right to do it and that we are "oppressors" and we "crush freedom" including religious freedom. The State Department would invariably come out with outraged statements. When the same thing occurs in Norway, everyone remains silent and no statements are made. When we "finally corner" them and ask these questions in plain English, they say that "it's the right thing to do", "it's different" or "let's move on".

This unconcealed interference in our country's domestic affairs has nothing to do with the efforts to protect freedom of religion and human rights. Either there should be uniform standards and that will allow us to make assessments of anything happening in other parts of the world and it will be a norm, that is, we will be on an equal footing when discussing what is happening beyond our borders. Or everyone only comments on developments in their own countries and has no right to look at others and express their views on what is happening elsewhere. This should be clearly defined.

There is a way out of this contradiction. From the viewpoint of the collective West, there is no contradiction. As a matter of fact, they believe it is normal because only they, in their opinion, have the right to control all processes in the world. No one else does. Recall that comment about the beautiful "garden" and the "jungle."

This is another example of the policy of double standards toward the Russian Federation, which Western countries, including Norway, have applied many times. This is just one more piece to the puzzle.

The deployment of the AU Monitoring, Verification and Compliance Mission in the Tigray Region of Ethiopia

Moscow welcomes the deployment of the African Union's Monitoring, Verification and Compliance Mission in Mekelle, the Tigray Region, whose aim is to monitor the implementation of peace agreements to settle the armed conflict in the north of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. We regard the mission, which includes representatives from Nigeria, South Africa and Kenya, as a vital element of the AU's mediation efforts to bring about a ceasefire and implement the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement signed in Pretoria on November 2, 2022.

We note with satisfaction that, according to the Ethiopian authorities' statements, over 106,000 tonnes of humanitarian food aid, 1.4 tonnes of medicines and 10,000 tonnes of basic necessities have been delivered to Tigray since the signing of the agreement. Regular flights to Mekelle, the administrative centre of the Tigray Region, and the city of Shire have been resumed.

We appreciate the effective assistance of the AU and its representatives and express hope for the further successful and coordinated actions to restore peace and ensure security and stability in Ethiopia in accordance with the African solutions to African problems principle.

The fourth session of the UN Ad Hoc Committee to Elaborate a Comprehensive International Convention on Countering the Use of Information and Communications Technologies for Criminal Purposes

The fourth session of the UN Ad Hoc Committee to Elaborate a Comprehensive International Convention on Countering the Use of Information and Communications Technologies for Criminal Purposes began in Vienna on January 9, 2023. The committee was established in 2019 in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 74/247, which was proposed by Russia and co-authored by 46 states. The goal is to create the world's first universal

international legal instrument for combatting cybercrime under the UN umbrella.

The member states attending the session will discuss the future agreement and its provisions on criminalisation, procedural measures and law enforcement of a comprehensive international convention. The chapters proposed for discussion by Chair of the Ad Hoc Committee Boumaiza Mebarki (Algeria) are largely based on the draft convention Russia submitted to the UN in the summer of 2021, which includes the latest achievements in combatting ICT crime and law enforcement practices and is aimed at promoting cooperation between the law enforcement agencies of the UN member states. The Ad Hoc Committee is to submit the final document to the UN General Assembly during its 78th session in 2024.

Russia's interagency delegation includes experts from the Foreign Ministry, the Prosecutor General's Office, the Investigative Committee, the Interior Ministry, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Digital Development, Communications and Mass Media. In this connection, we would like to point out that the authorities of the Republic of Austria have breached their obligations to house the UN's structural division and host international talks on the cybercrime convention by refusing to issue a visa to a member of the Russian delegation.

We hope for a constructive involvement of all the UN member states in these negotiations to coordinate the convention and to put it into effect as soon as possible in the interests of strengthening the international legal framework of joint efforts against ICT crime.

Reuters' investigation into cyberattacks on US nuclear research laboratories

Sometimes, Russophobia promoted by official Washington can take on quite intricate forms. Unfortunately, this time it is a new journalistic pseudo-investigation, by Reuters. The agency accuses

the notorious “Russian hackers” of launching attacks on three US nuclear research laboratories in August-September 2022, allegedly to gain access to sensitive information. The Cold River group mentioned in this context is credited with direct involvement in “Kremlin information operations.”

It seems to me that when it comes to an agency with a history, not a new media outlet, not a blog but a traditional media agency that claims to have a reputation, it might be a good idea to cite facts and evidence, rather than broadcast just one side’s opinions. The report contains no evidence or facts at all, just a reference to the opinions and assessments of some “independent experts” in information technology.

I am talking to Reuters now. You could have asked us, too. We have a Department of International Information Security. Our experts work in international organisations. We have great contacts, connections with our colleagues from other agencies involved in information security. We would have commented, and would have been happy to provide a detailed answer so that you wouldn’t have had to rely on unnamed “independent experts.” You could have had recognised experts speaking on their own behalf and ready to discuss these topics.

It looks like this news opportunity is so far-fetched that even representatives of the respective laboratories and the US Department of Energy declined to comment. But we would have commented. Not the way I am commenting now, debunking myths and preparing materials for refutation, or for the Anti-Fake section. You could have included our material in the article.

However, this story fits perfectly into the policy pursued by the Joe Biden administration, which is trying to portray Russia as nothing less than the key source of malicious activity in the information landscape. The US authorities are increasingly leaving private companies, non-governmental organisations and the media to do their bidding in this field. The media seem happy to grab at any planted story – trying to fulfil their orders as best they can, or just to

increase citations – not caring about the reliability of the information they disseminate.

It is more than noteworthy that in this case, the United States chose not to use the existing bilateral communication channels created precisely for this purpose, or the mechanisms of the ongoing dialogue on information security under the auspices of the UN. In particular, there is the relevant Open-ended Working Group, which is implementing our initiative to establish a global intergovernmental directory of Points of Contact for the prevention and peaceful settlement of conflicts when it comes to ICT, and the full use of international legal mechanisms for this purpose. Everything is there and it was created a long time ago. Instead, another anti-Russia canard has been launched.

Such irresponsible provocations do little to reduce tensions or build confidence in the digital environment. Moreover, Washington, diverting the international community's attention to imaginary threats, continues to promote its own agenda, which is, in fact, neocolonial. The United States is trying to establish a "rules-based international order" in the interests of Western technology companies, paying no heed to the rest of the world. Washington appoints undesirable countries at its own discretion, accuses them of computer attacks, thereby seeking to justify its own illegitimate sanctions policy.

As for Russia, our approach has been widely distributed. We insist that the key to an effective settlement of disagreements over ICT security is a constructive and equal interstate cooperation. This principled line remains unchanged.

The 160th anniversary of diplomatic relations with the Republic of Peru

January 17 marks the 160th anniversary of diplomatic relations with Peru. Emperor Alexander II and President of Peru Miguel de San Roman exchanged the relevant documents and thus launched the process of bilateral diplomatic relations.

Traditionally friendly relations unite Russia and Peru, countries with a 1,000-year history. These relations are based on mutual understanding, solidarity, pragmatism, consideration for each other's interests and respect for the fundamental principles of international law. Bilateral ties have never rested on any time-serving considerations, and this aspect is highly valuable in itself. Today this is expressed in our common principled commitment to expanding our relations still further in the complicated conditions of changing international relations.

We are ready to continue expanding multi-faceted cooperation with Lima on this constructive foundation in such spheres as political dialogue, trade, science and education, high technology, environmental protection, the prevention of emergency situations, disaster relief and clean-up operations, as well as cultural and humanitarian exchanges, in the spirit of strategic partnership, as the presidents of Russia and Peru had agreed in their joint statement of 2015.

The 80th anniversary of breaking the siege of Leningrad

The 872-day siege of Leningrad lasted from September 8, 1941, until January 27, 1944, and became the most terrible siege in the entire history of humankind. The people of Leningrad endured almost 900 days of pain and suffering, and displayed courage and self-sacrifice during that period. Over 641,000 city residents (up to one million, according to some sources) died of starvation and perished during artillery and air strikes as the siege ground on. Tens of thousands were killed during evacuation.

Nazi plans deprived Leningrad of any future. After failing to breach Soviet defences around the besieged city, the Germans decided to starve out the city's population. The German high command wanted to raze Leningrad to the ground and to kill its population by starvation and by exposing people to freezing temperatures. The enemy spared no effort or weapons to implement this plan. The Germans fired about 150,000 artillery shells and dropped over 107,000 incendiary and high-explosive bombs on the city. These statistics have been completely verified by historical records.

Nazi leaders assumed that there was no need to storm the city because this made it possible to avoid troop casualties. At the same time, they did not want its people to surrender because surrendering is part of warfare implying that they would have been obliged to care for the civilian population.

On January 12, 1943, the Stavka (Headquarters) of the Supreme High Command of the Soviet Armed Forces decided to launch a military operation and to break the siege of Leningrad. Codenamed Iskra (Spark), the operation involved elements of the Red Army's Leningrad and Volkhov fronts, the Baltic Fleet and long-range aviation.

Under the operation's main concept, the Leningrad Front was to attack from the west, and the Volkhov Front was to engage the German forces from the east. These concentric strikes aimed to defeat the German troops holding the Shlisselburg-Sinyavino salient. Lieutenant General Leonid Govorov and Army General Kirill Meretskov commanded both fronts. Army General Georgy Zhukov and Marshal of the Soviet Union Kliment Voroshilov coordinated the fronts' joint operations.

After thorough preparations, the 67th Army of the Leningrad Front, commanded by General Mikhail Dukhanov, launched an all-out offensive from the west to the east. The Baltic Fleet's warships, coastal artillery and aircraft, as well as long-range aviation, supported the offensive. Shlisselburg and the entire southern shore of Lake Ladoga were liberated completely on January 18. At

midnight January 18, a radio broadcast announced that the siege had been broken.

Breaking through the Siege of Leningrad was a turning point in the battle for the city on the Neva River. Upon the completion of Operation Iskra, the Soviet troops seized the initiative in the military action on the approaches to Leningrad. The conditions in the city, on the Leningrad Front and that of the Baltic Fleet significantly improved. Allies of the Soviet Union highly praised the victory in Leningrad. On behalf of the American people, US President Franklin D. Roosevelt sent a special letter of commendation to Leningrad "as a memorial to its gallant soldiers and to its loyal men, women and children who, isolated from the rest of their nation by the invader and despite constant bombardment and untold sufferings from cold, hunger and sickness, successfully defended their beloved city throughout the critical period September 8, 1941 to January 18, 1943, and thus symbolised the undaunted spirit of the peoples of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and of all the nations of the world resisting forces of aggression." Today's American leadership lacks the kind of wisdom known to the American leaders of those times.

Performance of Dmitri Shostakovich's Symphony No. 7 (the Leningrad Symphony) on August 9, 1942, at the Leningrad Philharmonic became one of the symbols of endurance and perseverance of the besieged city's defenders and residents.

In his decree of January 25, 1943, Supreme Commander-in-Chief Joseph Stalin issued a commendation to the troops of the Leningrad and Volkhov fronts for the successful breaking through the Siege of Leningrad and congratulated them on defeating the enemy. About 19,000 personnel of the Leningrad and Volkhov fronts and the Red Banner Baltic Fleet were awarded orders and medals, and 25 people receiving the title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

By an executive order of December 22, 1942, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR established the Medal for the Defence of Leningrad. On May 8, 1965, a title of Hero City was conferred upon Leningrad, along with the Order of Lenin and the Gold Star

Medal, to commemorate the mass heroism and courage of its defenders in the fight for the Motherland's freedom and independence in the Great Patriotic War.

The Russian Historical Society released a documentary called The Most Important Thing in Life on its YouTube channel. The film from the Present as the Past (Searches and Finds) series, created by the Pleyada television and radio company with the support of the History of the Fatherland Foundation, reflects on the siege, presenting, for the first time, a number of documents recreating the actual state of affairs at the beginning of the war and showing why the siege became possible and who helped Leningrad to stand strong and prevent surrender. The archives, testimonials of siege survivors, previously unseen memoirs, photographs and chronicles create a fully immersive experience taking the viewers back to the autumn of 1941.

I would like to remind all those questioning the role of the media in today's events that the Dozhd television channel (designated as a foreign agent in this country) once speculated on whether it would have been better to give up the city and how it should have been done. Even despite the colossal wave that rumbled through the country and beyond in response to that blasphemy, the channel stubbornly persisted in its line. This is exactly why you are called foreign agents – because you are trying to destroy the historical memory of our nation about what is the truth and what is a lie, what is good and what is evil.

Congratulations on the Day of Russian Press

I want to congratulate the journalists taking part in the briefing, even if via videoconference, and all representatives of the media, first of all those who work with texts, on the special holiday for the Russian media sphere. Tomorrow, January 13, we will mark the Day of Russian Press.

We are passing you the anniversary baton. As you remember, in 2022, the Foreign Ministry marked its 220th anniversary. Russian diplomacy and foreign policy mission are much older. The ministry has existed for 220 years.

Now it is your anniversary: 320 years ago, the first issue of the Vedomosti newspaper, established by Peter the Great, was published for the first time. This date was chosen as the beginning of the Russian news and sociopolitical journalism. What started as a small issue news bulletin is now a professional community with tens of thousands of publications. I will not even try to count how many people work in them.

These three-plus centuries have seen the amazing evolution of this fascinating, remarkable and colourful area of work to the benefit of society. It has its great heroes, impressive achievements and sad pages. Today, despite the explosive development of modern technology and changes in the principles and ways of perception of information, the Russian printed media have managed to preserve the most valuable features of the profession even after becoming digital. As before, the standards of quality journalism are accuracy, authenticity, comprehensiveness and objectivity. This is the common effort of authors, editors, typesetters, typographers and all those involved in this noble work. The audience also helps.

We highly appreciate your work. The new challenges of the time set a high professional bar for the media community. We wish you every success. Your mission and role are to provide the readers with the opportunity to create an objective image of events in the world, in the regions, cities, homes and courtyards.

On the eve of your professional holiday, I wish you and your families success in your professional work, inspiration, vitality, wellbeing and health. As well as luck of course. Good luck!

Answers to media questions:

Question: Answering a question on how the UN Secretariat assesses the decision by Germany, the United States and France to deliver infantry fighting vehicles to Kiev, Spokesperson for the United Nations Secretary-General Stephane Dujarric said that the goal of the United Nations is to see the conflict in Ukraine end as quickly as possible. How can you comment on this statement and the position of the United Nations?

Maria Zakharova: There are two points I would like to make in this regard. First, what do you mean by “the position of the United Nations?” The points of view expressed by the UN Secretariat and the UN member states are not the same. Let me remind you that under Article 97 of the UN Charter, the Secretary-General is the “chief administrative officer of the Organisation.” This means that functions of the Secretariat under his leadership are limited to administrative affairs, which does not imply expressing independent political views.

Second, it may look like a paradox, but there are double standards in what Spokesperson for the United Nations Secretary-General Stephane Dujarric said about the need for a swift resolution to the conflict. As a matter of fact, when talking about Ukraine, the developments in and around this country, Antonio Guterres’ subordinates always say that peace in that country must be achieved in compliance with the UN Charter and international law. This is what Stephane Dujarric said in his reply. For the Secretariat, this clearly includes the UN General Assembly resolutions, including the most ambiguous ones and those adopted without any consensus whatsoever. To give you an example, this includes UN General Assembly Resolution 68/262 “Territorial integrity of Ukraine,” which fails to recognise Crimea as part of Russia. During the vote on this resolution on March 27, 2014, almost half of UN member states denied it their support. The same applies to the resolutions adopted by the anti-Russia 11th UN General Assembly Emergency Special Session, where Russia was invariably referred to as an aggressor. Not a single one of them was adopted by consensus.

With all this in mind, it is clear that the UN Secretariat does not have the courage to condemn the Western arms supplies to Kiev, while levelling unverified and absurd charges against Russia. Moreover, they have been doing this regularly and at all levels.

We do remember that for all the seven years when the UN Security Council Resolution 2202 approving the Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements was in effect and provided an international framework for promoting an intra-Ukrainian settlement, there was not a single instance of UN Secretariat representatives pointing out to Kiev that it was sabotaging efforts to carry out this document.

I have a better way of framing this issue: I cannot remember a single instance when this was the main topic, let alone becoming mainstream. In all these years since the UN Security Council approved the Minsk agreements in 2015, there was not a single instance of the Secretariat referring to the document openly and in public to criticise the Kiev regime for failing to comply with this document. However, unlike the General Assembly resolution, it is binding for all UN member states. There is no getting around this fact when it comes to UN Security Council resolutions. Any person, whether vested with authority or not, has every right to say that this is a binding document for everyone and that it must be complied with. While assuming the role of calling for carrying out various international legal instruments, UN Secretariat representatives have for some reason been ignoring the decision by the Security Council, the UN's primary body for security.

Unfortunately, by electing to follow the General Assembly resolutions, adopted without consensus, while the UN Security Council with its primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security adopts its resolutions unanimously, the Secretariat cuts short its aspirations to be an impartial honest broker in the Ukraine crisis.

It has functional responsibilities that must be honoured.

Question: Tensions in Kosovo continue unabated. Belgrade asked the command of the NATO mission stationed in Kosovo to allow the return of up to 1,000 Serbian law enforcement officers to the region. What is Moscow's position on this issue?

Maria Zakharova: The news coming from Kosovo are worrying. The atmosphere of hatred towards Serbs is heating up. The Albanian radicals' attacks on Serbian youth, including an 11-year-old child, that took place on the eve and on Christmas Eve, are shocking in their blasphemy. These crimes are a direct consequence of ethnic intolerance which is maniacally fuelled by the local "prime minister" Albin Kurti, no matter what he may be saying now. We took note of the Kosovars' statements to the effect that the perpetrators will be punished, but no one has any illusions since too many anti-Serb incidents that have taken place over the past years have not been investigated.

Belgrade sent a request to the international peacekeeping force in Kosovo to deploy up to 1,000 Serbian military and police officers to Kosovo in an effort to protect Serbs in Kosovo. As you may be aware, this is not something that Belgrade thought up on the go or something that the Serbian authorities came up with overnight. This is enshrined in UN Security Council Resolution 1244. Reportedly, NATO command declined the request on January 6, 2023. Was this response predictable? Yes, it was. With this in mind, the Serbian leadership will determine its further steps seeking de-escalation and restoring order in Kosovo.

We remain firmly based on the primacy of international law and the fundamental UN Security Council Resolution 1244, which contains effective guidelines for overcoming any difficulties that may arise on the way to a Kosovo settlement.

Are Stephane Dujarric and Antonio Guterres now willing to call on NATO or the Kosovo Force to implement Resolution 1244 and specifically this paragraph? They will not make a mistake, because this document is binding for everyone. It can be put in the spotlight. Why not? It's a hot-button issue. It is not just being discussed. Things look like something is about to happen. Each time, the

constructively minded international community and Belgrade succeed at reining in the situation. But what we are witnessing is provocation following a provocation. Why doesn't the UN Secretariat, which is so deeply involved in matters surrounding Ukraine, quote and read out Resolution 1244 at its briefings and call on the stakeholder forces to implement it? Why doesn't the UN Secretariat want to support Belgrade's request under this resolution for the return of Serbian military and police forces to the province even though it says so?

To reiterate, no one will make a mistake if they take a UN Security Council resolution and read out its provisions keeping the integrity of this document and calls for implementing it. This is a good reason to show the Secretariat your unbiased stance.

The fact that the leading countries of the West have rejected this fair approach is quite telling. The US Ambassador to Belgrade has recently publicly questioned the relevance of Resolution 1244, which was allegedly adopted in different geopolitical circumstances and is therefore outdated now. Has anyone ever tried to revise it? Not to my knowledge. Have the realities changed? If Belgrade believes something is not right in this resolution, have there been any attempts to amend it? No, there haven't.

The US ambassador's remark clearly reflects Washington's push to cross out objectionable provisions from this UN document, including Serbia's right to return its security forces to Kosovo. This fabrication clearly resonates with the eye-opening confessions made by former German Chancellor Angela Merkel and ex-President of France Francois Hollande, who laid bare what Western politicians really thought about the international legal foundations of the settlement in Ukraine, including UN Security Council Resolution 2202 in support of the Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements. This is what the collective West really thinks about international law. Whenever it serves their purpose they quote it and act on it. Whenever it doesn't, they forget about it and insist on revising the situation outside the international legal framework. If they don't see it as something important, they will not comply with it and will revise it instead.

We are convinced that many risk factors that give rise to recurrent violence in Kosovo and Metohija can be neutralised by way of establishing the Community of Serbian Municipalities of Kosovo, which is vital to the security and wellbeing of the Serb population. However, contrary to the obligations under the Brussels Agreement of 2013, Pristina continues to sabotage the formation of this entity. There is no doubt that without the creation of the Community of Serbian Municipalities of Kosovo, life in the province will continue to be marred by bursts of tension caused by the Serbian community's vulnerability to repressive xenophobic policies pursued by the provincial "authorities."

Question: It has been reported that the Pristina authorities are planning to restore the house of Xhafer Deva, a Kosovo Albanian figure who collaborated with the Nazis during World War II. What can you say about this initiative?

Maria Zakharova: We commented on this issue more than once (on December 12, 26 and 30 of 2022). We are concerned by Kosovo's continued practice of rehabilitating and glorifying Nazism. You have noted this correctly. I can only add some details.

The 2023 territorial budget allocates 300,000 euros to restore the house of Nazi accomplice Xhafer Deva in Kosovo's Mitrovica. He was an odious minister of internal affairs in the Albanian puppet government during the German occupation of 1943-1944. He was not a leader or champion of democracy, but a high-ranking collaborationist. He was personally responsible for massive executions of anti-fascist movement members and civilians, the deportation of Jews to death camps and the bolstering of the Albanian SS division Scanderbeg. If you are told again that he was a champion of freedoms, don't believe it.

In February 2022, the European Union and the UN Development Programme prudently curtailed their participation in this project after the related publications came out and provoked an international uproar. Restoration work was suspended. However, Pristina is unwilling to stop (because Washington is always standing behind it) and intends to complete this project. Presenting Nazi criminals as

almost historical leaders of the Albanian national movement, the Kosovars continue forming their identity around outright butchers and scoundrels like Xhafer Deva, who is known as Kosovo's Hitler. Doesn't this remind you of something? We reiterated the same things today about Stepan Bandera and banderisation in Ukraine.

Unfortunately, such manifestations are obviously promoted by the US and leading EU countries. In December of the past year, they voted unanimously for the first time against the annual Russian resolution on countering the glorification of Nazism at the UN General Assembly. Before that, only the US and Ukraine were consistently voting against. Regrettably, now the EU countries have joined them. With its ostentatious silence on Pristina's policy of revising the history of World War II, Washington and its European puppets are encouraging the further growth of right-wing radical attitudes in Kosovo and aggravating threats to the security of the non-Albanian locals. Everything we are seeing now in Ukraine is practiced there, too.

Question: How do you see France's decision to start sending heavily armed vehicles to Ukraine? What are Paris's goals in pursuing this and what are the likely consequences of its actions?

Maria Zakharova: We are not surprised by Paris's escapades. We see France's steps as ill-considered and irresponsible with regard to the Ukraine crisis. The decision to send more military equipment to Ukraine is yet another action that provokes further escalation and more casualties, including civilian casualties, in these new Russian regions that are already under fire from French weapons, specifically the Caesar self-propelled artillery systems. As you may know, some material evidence left by the use of French weapons against civilian targets in Donbass was sent to the French ambassador in Russia, Mr Pierre Levy, the other day.

Conspicuous in this context are the dubious remarks by the French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Catherine Colonna to the effect that supplying the heavily armed combat vehicle, the AMX-10 RC, supposedly does not make France a party to the conflict. They should not be so modest. This equipment does make them a party!

With their provocative decision to donate French-made wheeled tanks to the Kiev regime, the French are opening Pandora's Box even wider and deepening their involvement in the conflict. Are you delivering them just for fun? Or to be on display in a museum? Or under a no-use commitment? Of course not! You should not misinform your own people.

Paris's policy to thoughtlessly pump Ukraine full of weapons has revealed the cynicism and duplicity of its statements about its desire to avoid conflict escalation, the need to maintain a dialogue with Russia, and its serious attitude towards Moscow's demands regarding security guarantees. It is either a dichotomy, a situation where different agencies controlled to one extent or another by French leaders take contradictory actions, or it is a bunch of cynical lies and fraud.

In fact, Paris continues to follow the spiral of confrontation and to call for a victory over Russia. In this way it is undoing the chances for "unbiased mediation," something France has repeatedly offered.

In our view, Paris needs to recognise its direct responsibility for the failure of the Minsk agreements and years-long effort to keep alive the Kiev regime's illusion that a military solution to the conflict was possible. This was first done at the verbal and political levels, and now as material incentives in the form of arms supplies.

Question: Do you have any news about Sputnik Lithuania Editor-in-Chief Marat Kasem, who was taken into custody by the Latvian authorities a few days ago?

Maria Zakharova: You also have this information. I know that the media has been following and covering the developments related to Mr Kasem. Right now he is in custody on trumped-up charges served by the Latvian authorities.

Let me refer you to the Foreign Ministry's January 5 comment that provides a principled political approach to Riga's reprisals against undesirable representatives of the Russian journalism community and generally against everyone who has his or her own opinion

rather than what is imposed by Russophobic propaganda. We have also made some additional comments on this topic. This is a case of account-settling, political persecution, and a move to kill Mr Kasem's career and use this example to intimidate others.

We will work hard to recruit the related international organisations, including the UN and UNESCO, to broker the release of this Sputnik Lithuania editor-in-chief. I am not sure that anything still "flickers" inside the OSCE. (But neither can we accuse it of a lack of action.) If an organisation declares itself in a certain capacity, it must show results.

We expect human rights NGOs to respond to the politically motivated harassment of Mr Kasem, just like Reporters Without Borders in its time pointed out the intolerable situation in the Baltic states, where journalists were subjected to persecution.

An end must be put to the political terrorism in Latvia. Marat Kasem should be released and allowed to resume his professional duties.

Incidentally, is Mr Stephane Dujarric in the mood to say anything?

Question: My question concerns a report in the Saudi newspaper Asharq Al-Awsat stating that the talks between the foreign ministers of Russia, Syria and Turkey were planned for January 11, 2023, in Moscow. What issues arose when scheduling the talks? When are the talks expected to take place?

Maria Zakharova: January 11 was not set as the date for talks. We have already said that discussion of the meeting continues.

Question: Is the Russian Foreign Ministry following the situation of Russian national Sofia Sapega, who is currently in Belarusian prison? Are there any talks in progress concerning her release – although it has been reported that her pardon appeal was denied?

Maria Zakharova: If you followed our activities, you would not be asking if we are following the situation. Unfortunately, your question reflects a certain disregard for Ms Sapega's fate and our own efforts.

Protecting the rights of Russian nationals who find themselves in a difficult situation abroad and providing consular assistance are priorities of the Russian Foreign Ministry, not only in theory but in practice as well.

The Russian Embassy in Minsk is directly in charge of handling the cases of Russian nationals under investigation or convicted in Belarus, including for anti-government activity or involvement in unauthorised campaigns. The foreign ministers of the two countries address this matter regularly during talks. We consistently encourage our partners to treat these individuals most humanely.

As concerns Russian national Sofia Sapega, sentenced to six years in prison by a Belarusian court in May 2022, our consular officers maintain constant contact with her parents and attorney. These are not simply diplomatic contacts but regular work covering all aspects that we must handle. And it is exactly what we do.

Question: The trilateral meeting between the foreign ministers of Russia, Türkiye and Syria was scheduled to take place on Wednesday, January 11. Earlier, there were media reports that the UAE is involved in organising this meeting. According to a Bloomberg report, Türkiye, together with Russia and the UAE are striving to ensure President Bashar al-Assad's political rehabilitation and force the United States out of Syria. What would the Foreign Ministry's comment be on these reports? What did the three ministers actually discuss during the meeting?

Maria Zakharova: What would you like me to comment on? What kind of reports?

Question: On the fact that there is a certain aspiration to force the United States out of Syria and out of the region in general.

Maria Zakharova: Who are you referring to? Who wants this?

Question: Potentially, those who arranged this trilateral meeting.

Maria Zakharova: I wish you could hear yourself and the absurd way you framed your question. Just listen: Is there an aspiration to

force the United States out of Syria? This begs the question: On what grounds is the United States present in Syria? To answer the question about forcing the United States out of Syria, we have to begin by asking on what grounds the United States forced itself in there. Who invited the US? Who gave it the corresponding international mandate? Who legitimised its presence there? This is the question.

Being an independent state, Syria keeps raising this issue. The legitimate leaders of this independent nation, and the people of Syria, are tired of asking what the United States is doing on Syrian territory in various formats. The most perplexing thing here is that no one answers them in the United States, be it at the presidential level, in the corresponding foreign policy agencies, or within the deep state, in US civil society, or the media. Everyone is silent on this matter. I can go even further by saying that when I talk to Western journalists, they are surprised to discover that the United States is actually involved in Syria and is present there on the ground, rather than merely pursuing its political or economic interests; there are private military companies there engaging in activities without any mandate, including military activity. Western journalists are asking why the United States is there with its military, even if it's only private military companies instead of regular troops? It is clear to us whom they report to. The answer is simple: the Americans are maintaining their sphere of influence, which includes taking Syria's minerals to sell and legalise them. It is not just about legalising these raw materials, but covering up illegal trade, including in Syrian natural resources.

When you ask who wants to force the United States out of Syria, the answer is quite simple: Syria wants this, because it has grown tired of raising this issue for the past 10 years. Let me remind you that the United States has been persistent in its attempts to achieve a regime change in Syria for decades. This is all there is to say about that.

As for the possible trilateral meeting, let me reiterate that this is a work in progress. We will make sure to share with you the date and

details on the agenda, the participants, and formats as soon as the parties reach an agreement.

Question: Finland has ruled out the deployment of nuclear weapons on its territory after joining NATO. Its accession is expected to be finalised in the summer of 2023, as reported by Finnish media citing the country's foreign ministry. What does Russia think of these statements?

Maria Zakharova: We are certainly following the discussion in Finland concerning the country's decision to join NATO, along with the possible deployment of nuclear weapons on its territory.

I would like to point out in this regard that Finnish Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto said that he believed that no nuclear weapons would be installed on the Finnish territory after acceding to NATO.

We will assess this extremely sensitive situation based on actions rather than words, as I have repeatedly said before.

Notably, Finland has issued a caveat that Helsinki did not and would not set any conditions for its accession to NATO because it does not want to narrow down its activity within this military bloc. At the same time, the Finnish leadership intentionally withholds the fact that NATO infamously declared itself a nuclear alliance.

However, the organisation's headquarters have been actively pushing Finland to take part in the alliance's destabilising exercises to practise openly anti-Russia scenarios of joint nuclear weapon use. NATO representatives thus clearly state that they would like to see Finnish military personnel gain respective practical experience.

I would like to remind you that non-nuclear members of the bloc also participate in the drills of NATO's so-called joint nuclear missions. Therefore, not only the countries where US nuclear weapons are actually deployed but also the countries involved in the maintenance and support of such operations are associated with the alliance's nuclear policy.

We will closely monitor Helsinki's response to such invitations and draw the respective conclusions.

Question: Türkiye has supported Vladimir Zelensky's 10-point peace plan, which Russia does not accept. "Russia is expressing readiness for talks. Vladimir Zelensky has proposed a 10-point peace plan. Türkiye supports this peace plan and continues to work on it," said Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu on January 10. In your opinion, does this hinder communication with Türkiye on reaching peace in Ukraine?

Maria Zakharova: We are well aware of Türkiye's assessment of Vladimir Zelensky's "peace plan." We cannot agree with it. Ankara's support for Kiev's contrivance will unlikely facilitate the search for optimal ways to reach peace in Ukraine.

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and other high-ranking officials have repeatedly said that Russia finds this plan unacceptable. I do not see any reason to give additional comments. All the assessments have already been made.

Question: Tensions have escalated again in Serbia in relation to the Kosovo issue. Is the safety of Russian nationals living in Serbia and those who are going to visit it in danger? Does the Foreign Ministry suggest they refrain from visiting Kosovo?

Maria Zakharova: As for trips to Kosovo, the Foreign Ministry's recommendations to refrain from such trips are still in force because such travel can have serious security consequences. It is also necessary to take into account the absence of consular assistance in the region because the Russian Federation, guided by the UN Security Council resolution, does not recognise Kosovo's independence, which was proclaimed unilaterally.

Question: According to Ukraine's National Security and Defence Council, Russia could offer Ukraine a "Korean scenario" for settling the conflict. Is Moscow considering such scenarios?

Maria Zakharova: On January 9, 2023, Presidential Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov refuted that information. I think you may have seen the refutation.

As for settling the conflict in Ukraine, we would like to remind everyone that it was Ukraine that terminated the peace talks it itself initiated in late February 2022, and left the proposals we made on April 15, 2022, unanswered. It looks like the Ukrainian authorities are more interested in spreading rumours and speculation instead of discussing the possibility of using political and diplomatic methods to attain the goals of the special military operation.

I cannot say anything new in response to your question. All the assessments have been made and announced.

Question: Türkiye continues to mediate to settle the Moscow-Kiev relationship. For example, Ankara is mediating a “humanitarian corridor” between Russia and Ukraine. What is Moscow’s attitude towards these plans by the Turkish authorities?

Maria Zakharova: On January 11, 2023, two meetings were held in Türkiye between Human Rights Commissioner Tatyana Moskalkova and the Verkhovna Rada’s Commissioner for Human Rights, Dmitry Lubinets, first in a bilateral format and later with their Turkish colleague, Seref Malkoc. The results of those meetings have been commented on by Tatyana Moskalkova. I recommend that you read her comments.

As for the idea of support for such projects, I am not going to comment on the talks that have been completed.

I would like to remind you, though, for the sake of objectivity, that in February and March 2022, people were prevented from entering Russia from the Kiev-controlled territories of Donbass. They had to cross the Ukrainian-Polish border and go via Poland to enter Belarus or Russia via Kaliningrad, using alternate routes to return to Russia or to their homes.

As you know, such “initiatives” and “proposals” must not have an expiration date or a time bar. They must not depend on political circumstances. The desire to help people must not have days off or lunch breaks. People in that region have been suffering for years. They – the civilian population – demand help and protection. The desire to help must not be restricted by time-serving considerations.

I remember very well when the Polish authorities delivered a blow at Russia’s diplomatic presence in Poland, which seriously complicated our ability to help the refugees who were willing to enter Russia from the territory of Ukraine. Did you hear any appeals to the Kiev regime to allow these people to leave Ukraine and enter Russia because they wanted it? It was the other way around. It is Kiev’s desire to prevent people from entering Russia, to destroy them.

The international community pretended to not see any of that. Do you remember what they did when it became impossible not to see that Ukrainian citizens were crossing into Russia? They claimed that Ukrainian citizens were abducted and forcibly moved to and kept in Russia. Utter nonsense.

We have always been committed to mediation and assistance. However, I would like to say again that there are no days off or lunch breaks on this job, that the suffering of people must not be forgotten, ever or by anyone.

Question: Nikol Pashinyan made a number of statements regarding Armenia-Russia relations during the news conference. On the one hand, the Armenian prime minister had many complaints about the Russian peacekeepers’ activities in Nagorno-Karabakh and he also announced the cancellation of the CSTO exercises in Armenia. On the other hand, though, Pashinyan noted that the level of trust in Moscow-Yerevan relations was at an all-time high, and Armenia was even willing to sign a peace treaty with Azerbaijan as suggested by Russia. What does Moscow think about these statements by the Armenian leader?

Maria Zakharova: I answered this question earlier in detail. A comment on this was posted this morning. We are acting as unbiased mediators who really want to see bilateral relations normalise.

As a reminder, we proposed holding a trilateral meeting on December 23, 2022. The leaders of the two countries agreed to participate. But at the last minute the Armenian leadership canceled Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan's visit, which rendered discussing the peace treaty and other priority issues involved in Armenian-Azerbaijani normalisation, including the Lachin Corridor, impossible.

If our Armenian partners are genuinely interested in resolving the above issues as part of the comprehensive implementation of the top-level tripartite agreements, we must continue to work as a team instead of engaging in theoretical philosophising. "Team" and "work" are the two operative words. Russia's proposal to provide a platform for Armenian-Azerbaijani peace treaty talks remains on the table. Our capabilities as intermediaries remain at the disposal of the parties.

Question: What about the "differences" between Yerevan and Moscow?

Maria Zakharova: We were the ones to pinpoint this issue in today's commentary and we covered more than just one "nuance." There are several issues like that. We see the difference in assessing issues of major importance not only for Armenia, but for regional security as well. This is what we are focusing on.

Importantly, it takes more to do our work than grabbing a microphone and making a public comment, or getting answers, or issuing requests for answers. We maintain communication with the stakeholders literally around the clock. We are using bilateral channels to try to have the Armenian side, its official representatives and people of authority clarify their ongoing position. There are issues of fundamental importance so, accordingly, their position may have some leeway or reservations,

but the fundamental approaches are expected to remain unchanged.

Question: Many foreign institutions have recently raised their estimates for China's economic growth in 2023. How do you see China's economic prospects? What role has China's drastic adjustment of its epidemic prevention policies played in the country's economic recovery?

Maria Zakharova: Economic growth estimates are given by the relevant national, supranational and non-governmental institutions. This is not a question for the Foreign Ministry.

As for our trade and economic ties, China is Russia's largest trade partner with long history of relations, comprehensive partnership and strategic cooperation. We are interested in a strong and fast-growing China, as well as in strengthening and diversifying our multifaceted practical ties.

We take a positive view of China's decisions on the phased lifting of anti-epidemic restrictions, including on cross-border travel and the transport of goods. We are ready to cooperate with our partners to ensure further intensification of Russian-Chinese trade and economic cooperation and the resumption of large-scale exchanges between the people in Russia and China, as agreed.

Question: Ukraine will receive more offensive strike weapons from the West. Notably, not just strike weapons, but the kinds of offensive weapons the West previously refused to provide to Kiev. US President Joe Biden recently announced the allocation of 50 Bradley armoured vehicles as part of another aid package worth about \$3 billion. Along with Washington, Paris said it was ready to provide Ukraine with AMX-10 RC light wheeled tanks and Bastion armoured personnel carriers. What is Moscow's assessment of these decisions, and how will they affect the Ukraine crisis? Presidential Spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the United States and NATO are indirectly and covertly involved in the conflict in Ukraine, providing Kiev with weapons, technology and intelligence. How will Moscow respond to the collective West's actions? How will the

West's decision to provide offensive weapons affect the Ukraine crisis?

Maria Zakharova: We regularly make our view known to our "partners" at the relevant UN bodies and other platforms: the Western countries supplying any type of weapons to the special military operation zone is unacceptable.

We consider the statements by the United States and its allies on expanding the range of military equipment to the Kiev regime solely as a continuation of their dedicated policy to prolong the conflict, which means prolonging the suffering of the Ukrainian people and the escalation of this conflict.

The supply of offensive strike weapons will not prevent the Russian Federation from achieving the goals of its special military operation. I will say this again for those who may not want to hear it: the new systems being sent to the Armed Forces of Ukraine will become legitimate targets for us.

Question: On January 10, NATO and the EU signed a Joint Declaration on Cooperation to strengthen their strategic partnership amid the growing geopolitical competition. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said at a news conference following the signing, that it is more important than ever to further advance the strategic partnership between NATO and the EU, and that they would further strengthen their support for Ukraine in 2023. Can you comment on that?

Maria Zakharova: A comment on this was posted on the ministry's website yesterday.

The Joint Declaration on EU-NATO Cooperation, which was signed in Brussels on January 10, 2023, has reaffirmed the EU's full subordination to the bloc, which is a military instrument being used to ensure US interests. This is just as we have always said. Do you remember how many times we described the EU as, regrettably, an economic department of NATO? It is not an independent agency but is subordinate to the global agenda of the military-political bloc,

where the word “political” is being dominated by “military.” While declaring “the importance of the transatlantic bond” and “mutually reinforcing the strategic partnership” between the EU and NATO, the declaration is promoting the tasks set out in the NATO Strategic Concept adopted at the bloc’s summit in Madrid in June 2022.

Contrary to their OSCE obligations, they view security in the Euro-Atlantic area through the prism of standing up to Russia, increasing the supply of weapons and equipment to the Kiev regime, enhancing military mobility in the European “theatre of war,” and continuing NATO’s expansion. The declaration’s provision on the secondary or, as the bloc’s strategists put it, complementary role of the European Union defence policy relevant to NATO has effectively cancelled the EU’s claim for autonomy in this sphere.

The EU, as an association of countries, has clearly lost its independence. They are not just delegating their powers but have exchanged their sovereignty for “decision-making.” However, decisions are not adopted at NATO during discussions, debates and other democratic procedures. Their “non-kindred souls” in Washington are writing the scenarios and pushing them towards implementation.

On the global stage, the EU is taking its partnership with NATO to the next level, which includes joining the geopolitical competition with China and efforts to ensure the bloc’s superiority in protecting critical infrastructures, space, the media and even the security implications of climate change.

It is clear that NATO and the EU’s aggressive and confrontational approach towards states that pursue independent foreign policies, and their attempts to divide the world into “us and them” will only hinder the peaceful settlement of conflicts and weaken international security in the face of the persisting challenges of terrorism, the threat of which was mentioned in the declaration. There is no sign of any worldwide collective efforts in this respect.

The Americans’ motives are very clear. They want to pull the EU into the “geostrategic competition,” as it is described in the

declaration, which Washington has launched so that Europe can play the role of America's vassal, rapidly ceding its political and economic positions and hence becoming increasingly more dependent on the United States.

For decades, Europe's largest countries were pulled into that "association" for the alleged economic and financial reasons and for gain. But after they walked through the door, it was slammed shut and locked behind them, bringing the economic implications closer to the military ones. A floodgate has been opened between them, robbing the EU countries of any chance for self-sufficiency, independence and the ability to protect their national interests or even economies.

Question: The Armenian Defence Ministry said that it does not see fit to hold exercises with the CSTO peacekeeping forces in Armenia this year. What do you think of this decision?

Maria Zakharova: I answered this question in my opening remarks. Also, Russian Presidential Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov already commented on it.

Question: In his interview with Izvestia on January 10, 2023, Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Rudenko did not mention relations between Russia and the DPRK. How would you comment on that? And what can you say about the humanitarian situation in North Korea?

Maria Zakharova: In his interview, Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Rudenko answered journalists' questions. It is not a position paper by the Foreign Ministry. Journalists did not ask about Russia's relations with North Korea, so there was no comment on that score.

The Foreign Ministry website has a section devoted to bilateral relations. Russia appreciates the current level of traditionally friendly relations with its Far Eastern neighbour and Pyongyang's decisive support for the special military operation, as well as our close interaction on other current international issues.

As for the humanitarian situation in the DPRK, the North Korean side could answer this question better than I can.

Question: Ukraine insists on adopting a 10th package of sanctions against Russia, especially on including Rosatom in it. Would you comment on that?

Maria Zakharova: What do you expect from Ukrainian nationalists? Their demands keep getting more absurd.

Question: The American magazine Foreign Policy has published an article that says that Türkiye allegedly supplies Ukraine with cluster munitions. How would you comment on that?

Maria Zakharova: The answer to this question is in the competence of the Russian Defence Ministry.

Question: You have partially commented on Armenian-Azerbaijani relations, but a few questions remain.

Maria Zakharova: You don't seem to see the point. It isn't our approach that remains unclear, but that of the Armenian side. When their approach is clarified, it will become clear to everyone. Then we will be able to answer practical questions, rather than try to figure out the principled approach. We talk about this problem regularly.

Question: The region of Artsakh has been blocked by Azerbaijan for 32 days. The situation was exacerbated by a power line accident. You are calling on the Armenian and Azerbaijani sides to resolve any outstanding issues through dialogue. At the same time, on December 10, 2022, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev openly announced the purpose of the blockade against Armenia at a news conference. He said the door was open to any Armenians who want to leave Artsakh. How can the corridor be reopened, as planned, in this situation? Can you comment on this?

Maria Zakharova: This is a very complex issue. There is no point in taking a specific statement and trying to provide a separate response to it. This will lead to additional complications. We have a principled approach that is not based on populism or on today's

political motives, but involving a series of complex steps that rely on an international legal foundation. It is important that all parties to the agreements consent to this. This must be gradually implemented. We call on the Azerbaijani and Armenian sides to show goodwill and jointly seek compromises. We will do our best to promote the implementation of what we have agreed on.

When anyone decides to unilaterally revise their approach and make changes to fundamental assessments that were given earlier, this will create tension in subsequent interaction. Parties either comply with their agreements or not. Or they need to let the other stakeholders know that their approach has changed, honestly and publicly, primarily their fellow citizens. Diplomacy is an interesting field, which involves a variety of methods and techniques. But there are fundamental matters – not tactics or strategies, but formulating the state's policy.

Question: The Armenian media report that the UN Security Council was unable to adopt a statement on the Lachin Corridor situation allegedly because of Russia's objection. Azerbaijani Ambassador to Belgium and Luxembourg Vagif Sadigov thanked Russia and the United Kingdom for refusing to approve that statement. How can the Russian and UK approaches coincide, given ongoing international processes? Why have Russia's proposals led to such a result?

Maria Zakharova: We had a constructive approach. We saw how our proposals were ignored by the French sponsors of the document, even in the purely factual part, which mentioned the statements by the leaders of Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia, which provide the groundwork for the normalisation of Armenian-Azerbaijani relations. We were making an effort and were constructive, but we encountered a lack of interest in listening to our approach.

As for specific statements, they are also a part of what we call a crisis and a settlement. There will be many more provocative statements that will push discussion to the side and hinder the implementation of practical measures.

Question: Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev made comments that have implications for Armenia's territorial integrity, stating that if Yerevan does not want delimitation, Baku will draw the border as it sees fit.

Maria Zakharova: I just talked about provocative statements that stir up the situation. There have been and will continue to be many people with many statements. Several forces are intertwined here; interests overlap and parties are fighting. This region knows it all.

Question: Isn't this a consequence of the fact that Armenia's CSTO allies have not responded to Azerbaijan's aggression in an intelligible manner?

Maria Zakharova: There have been many comments about an "intelligible response." Let's get back to the basics. We need to understand the "intelligible response" from the Armenian side on the main issues. We can count on that.

There has been a reaction from the CSTO; I wouldn't call it unintelligible. If it did not coincide with the views of some political figures involved in the settlement and the situation around it, that doesn't mean it was "unintelligible."

There are agreements between the parties, an outlined path and a plan of action. There is no need to deviate from it or to try to look at one part of the picture without seeing the whole. It is a large, multipart, complex picture. We should not focus on any single statement. That will lead nowhere.

Question: What measures will Moscow take in response to attempts to confiscate Russian assets? This month, Estonia is working out a mechanism to seize Russian assets blocked in that country and to send them to help Ukraine.

Maria Zakharova: We have repeatedly said that we consider any "freezing" or "blocking" of assets belonging to the Russian Federation to be a completely illegal measure that violates the generally accepted standards of commercial and international law.

We see the plans of unfriendly countries, in particular, Estonia in this case, to use the funds of the Russian Federation to reach their political goals as a gross encroachment on sovereign property. This will receive an appropriate response.

Russian authorities are considering all possible legal mechanisms to regain access to Russian assets in foreign countries and are prepared to take decisive steps to protect national property or apply individual compensatory measures. The refusal of unfriendly countries to cooperate with Russia within the legal framework will demonstrate to all parties in the global financial system that the status of a nation's sovereign assets depends on the opportunistic geopolitical realities in several Western countries. Most importantly, it will show that they are thieves (to put in simple terms that a philistine can understand).

Question: Indian occupation troops killed 214 completely innocent Kashmiris, including women and teenagers, while hundreds of Kashmiris were wounded in the occupied valley last year. Can you comment on this situation?

Maria Zakharova: This question is rooted in the difficult history of relations between Pakistan and India. We have repeatedly given detailed comments on this issue.

Question: Israel announced a list of five sanctions against Palestine, including reductions in the funding of occupied Palestine, abrogation of privileges for Palestinian officials and the suspension of humanitarian aid to the occupied West Bank. In addition, Israel plans to evict hundreds of Palestinian families from their homes. Can you comment on this?

Maria Zakharova: Russia has not changed its positions of principle on the issues of a Palestinian settlement. In our dialogue with the new government of Israel, we intend to continue our former policy line. We advocate the resumption of Israeli-Palestinian talks as soon as possible with a view to finding long-term settlement to the Palestinian problem based on the relevant international legal foundation and the two-state solution.

Question: According to media reports, the Taliban government has set a ten day deadline to close women's beauty salons in Afghanistan. Earlier, the Taliban announced a ban on education in women's universities. What can you say about this?

Maria Zakharova: To my knowledge, this applies only to one province. The Taliban authorities have already refuted the reports on closing beauty salons.

We believe the ban introduced by the Taliban government on the education of women in universities is much more important. The Foreign Ministry has commented on this. In our view, education without any discrimination guarantees the favourable social and economic development of any country, including Afghanistan.

That said, while we expect Kabul to observe basic human rights, we will not impose our own views on the Afghans with respect to how they organise their social life.

Question: Uzbekistan is carrying out a constitutional reform and structural changes in its government. The history of a new, law-based social Uzbekistan is being created before our eyes. What do you think about the changes envisaged by the constitutional reform in Uzbekistan? Baxtiyor Saidov was appointed the new foreign minister of Uzbekistan. Have the foreign ministers of Russia and Uzbekistan exchanged views during their contacts?

Maria Zakharova: As a strategic partner and an ally of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the Russian Federation supports the efforts of its leaders both inside the country and in the context of regional rapprochement launched several years ago.

As far as we can tell, the structural changes in the Uzbek government you mentioned are an element of efforts to improve the executive authorities in accordance with the programme guidelines of the head of state.

As for contacts between our foreign ministers, on December 31, 2022, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov sent a message of greetings

to Baxtiyor Saidov in connection with his appointment as acting foreign minister of Uzbekistan.

I believe they will meet soon. We have many upcoming, large interstate events and they will offer a timely opportunity for our foreign ministers to compare positions.

Question: In Bulgaria, the Constitutional Court has initiated a criminal case against the government of this country in connection with the supply of weapons to Ukraine. How would you comment on this?

Maria Zakharova: It is impossible to monitor or evaluate national litigation. If there is such a criminal case in Bulgaria, then this is an internal matter of the country.

We have our stance on this issue. We absolutely know that weapons supplies to the Kiev regime lead to an escalation of the conflict and great casualties among the military and civilians.

The collective West has been trying to destroy international law for a long time. But it has not been cancelled yet. Countries have commitments on various aspects of weapons supplies. This applies to re-export and compliance with contracts that do not provide for supplies to third countries (this is just prohibited). States have internal control over the proliferation of weapons through supplies, sales and so on. These things should be under the control of partner states or relevant branches of power (the judiciary, legislature and “media power”), if they go beyond the scope of legality.

Despite the fact that I spoke a lot about international law, that is not the main thing here; it is the security of people, citizens who are not only on the territory of Russia, Ukraine and the European continent. Weapons appear in Africa, in Chad. There will be more to come. Security issues as a global concept should be at the forefront. These matters should dominate when making decisions about the supply of weapons, their sale and the suppression of illegal activities. Unfortunately, it is not security or even legality that are at

the forefront, but money, dishonesty and the desire to dominate not through competition, but through pitting countries against each another, chaos and incitement. This applies not only to the situation around Ukraine and the supply of weapons there. This is a worldwide trend that is gaining momentum in many areas.